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ABSTRACT

This journal issue focuses on the learner, looks at why literacy has become a major concern and examines the changes brought about by the mastery of new skills. "Literacy/Illiteracy in an International Perspective" (Carman St. John Hunter) frames the discussion by stressing that literacy and illiteracy are moving targets, not fixed by abstract definitions but varied according to the socioeconomic realities of a particular place at a particular time. "A Question of Survival" (Klaudia Rivera) presents results of interviews with six women learners in Queens, New York, to find out what effect a literacy program is having on their lives. "Learning in the Workplace" (David Harman) reinforces Hunter's view with an examination of education in the workplace and the importance of workplace education in providing opportunities for lifelong learning. "Working Together" (David Walker, John Comings) describes the Nepal National Literacy Program. "Literacy Leads the Way in Saam Njaay" (Molly Melching) reports on the changes literacy brought to a village in Senegal and to the thinking of the development workers running the literacy training program. "Acculturation Is a Very Big Word" (David Moffat, Wendy Walker) discovers what literacy meant to Southeast Asian refugees in Lowell, Massachusetts. "Putting Learners Center-Stage" (David Kahler) discusses literacy materials that focus on the learner first, and "Field Report. Letter from Tanzania" (Hilda Kokhuhirwa) addresses the subject of women in a literacy program in Tanzania. Sources of information on literacy are included. (YLB)

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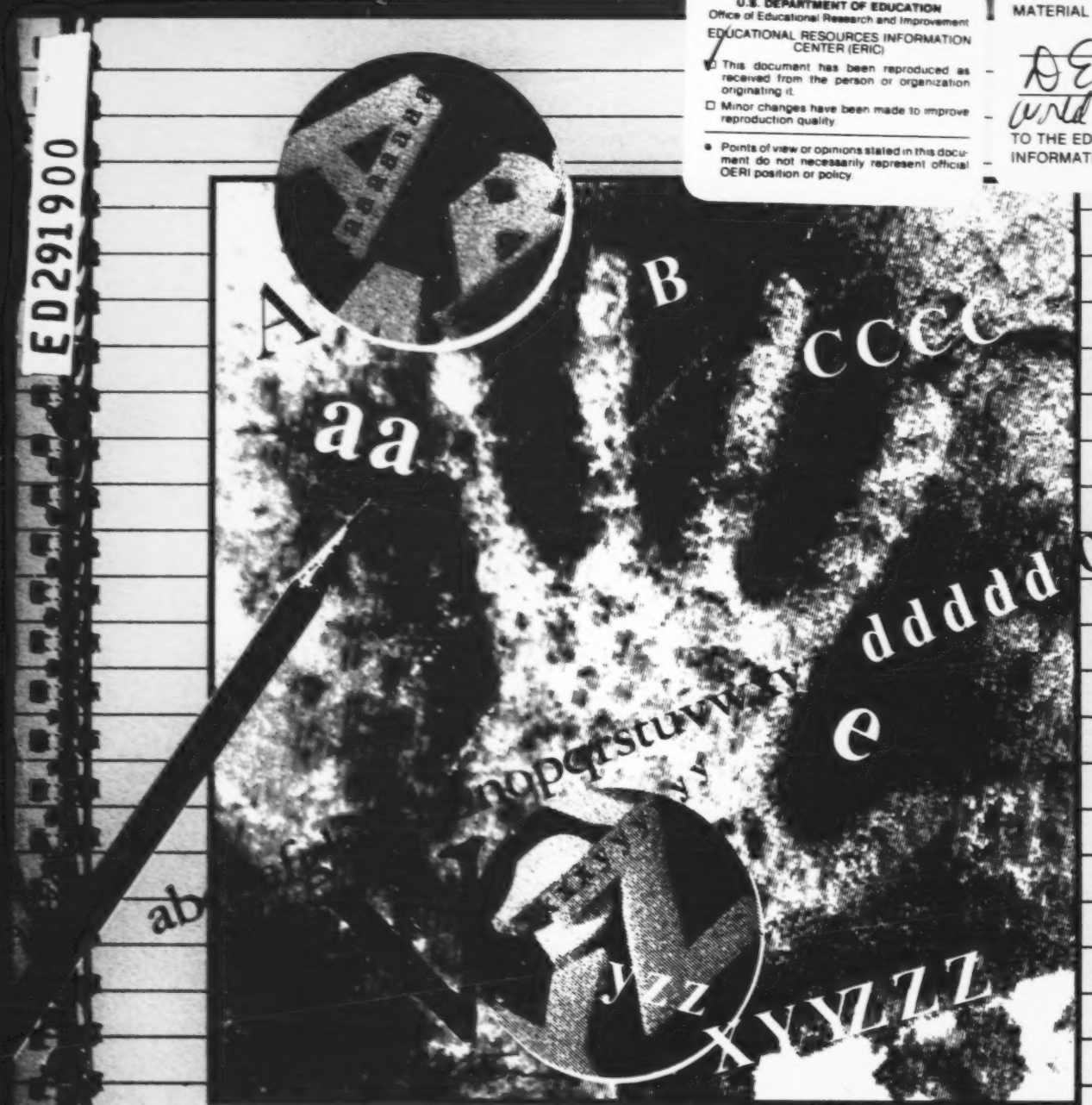

lit'er-ate (-ĭt), *a.* [L. *litteratus, literatus.* See LETTER.]
1. Instructed in letters ; educated ; specif., able to read and write.

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World Education

Editorial

Reports Magazine is one of the means World Education uses to discuss developments in the field, to share findings from innovative programs, and to stimulate thinking on emerging issues. It is published semi-annually.

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Throughout the world, adult literacy has once again become a topic of interest, and illiteracy, one of concern. Media, businesses, and governments from the federal to the local level in the United States have widely publicized the need for a more literate workforce in this era of economic upheaval. For poor communities in both hemispheres, literacy has implied increasing participation in the decisions that affect everyday life. And Unesco, which recently celebrated forty years of strengthening "the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind," has begun preliminary meetings to prepare for International Literacy Year in 1990.

Community workers, national planners and international donors have long thought of literacy as a necessary tool of development. Thirty years ago, reading and writing were considered fundamental to social well-being and progress. However, experience taught that many social, economic and political factors affected people's use of and desire for literacy skills; and that reading and writing were secondary to the fulfillment of basic needs such as adequate health care, housing, and employment.

Approaches over the past decade have lead to a more clearly defined role for literacy training in improving the quality of life for marginalized individuals and communities. Community workers have seen how writing gives a voice to those who have long remained silent, and how reading brings an understanding of the human forces that control society's resources. Increasingly, adults with no or few literacy skills have demanded that they be given the opportunity to master the written word, rather than be mastered by it.

Throughout this issue, we have tried to focus on the learner, to look at why literacy was considered in the first place, and to examine the changes brought about by the mastery of these new skills. Carman St. John Hunter frames our discussion by stressing that literacy and illiteracy are "moving targets," not fixed by abstract definitions but varied according to the socio-economic realities of a particular place at a particular time. David Harman reinforces this view with an examination of education in the workplace and the importance of workplace education in providing opportunities for life-long learning. To see better the specific contexts of different learners, we visit women learners in Queens, New York; Southeast Asian refugees in Lowell, Massachusetts; and villagers in Tanzania and Senegal. The levels and types of skills for each society and community differ; yet learners both in the US and abroad express a similar desire for more control of their world and for access to its resources.

These pages continue a discussion on literacy that has occurred frequently in past issues of ***Reports***. As we approach International Literacy Year, ***Reports*** will again devote an issue each in 1988 and 1989 to literacy. To keep our discussion topical and lively, we encourage your comments about and criticisms of the ideas presented here.

The Editors

Reports

Number 26; Spring 1987

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Literacy/Illiteracy in an International Perspective

Both in the US and overseas, the first steps towards tackling illiteracy may be to overcome our own myths

by Carman St. John Hunter

Illiteracy is not an isolated phenomenon. It can neither be understood nor responded to apart from the complex set of social, political, and economic issues of which it is but one indicator. Based on 1980 statistics, Unesco estimated that — excluding China, Korea and Vietnam, a rather large exclusion — there were perhaps 814 million illiterate people in the world. They include the poorest of the poor in every nation. In rural areas, they are the landless peasants, virtually enslaved by systems of production that deny them a just economic return for their labor. In urban centers, they are the unemployed and underemployed, marginal and often transient populations, excluded from the mainstream of the societies in which they live. They are the people with the highest rate of infant mortality and the lowest life expectancy. They lack access to adequate food, to health care and to the information and resources to prevent disease. They have only minimal power over their environment — physical, political and economic. Of all of these accompaniments of poverty, illiteracy is, perhaps, the least life-threatening and, therefore, the least acutely felt.

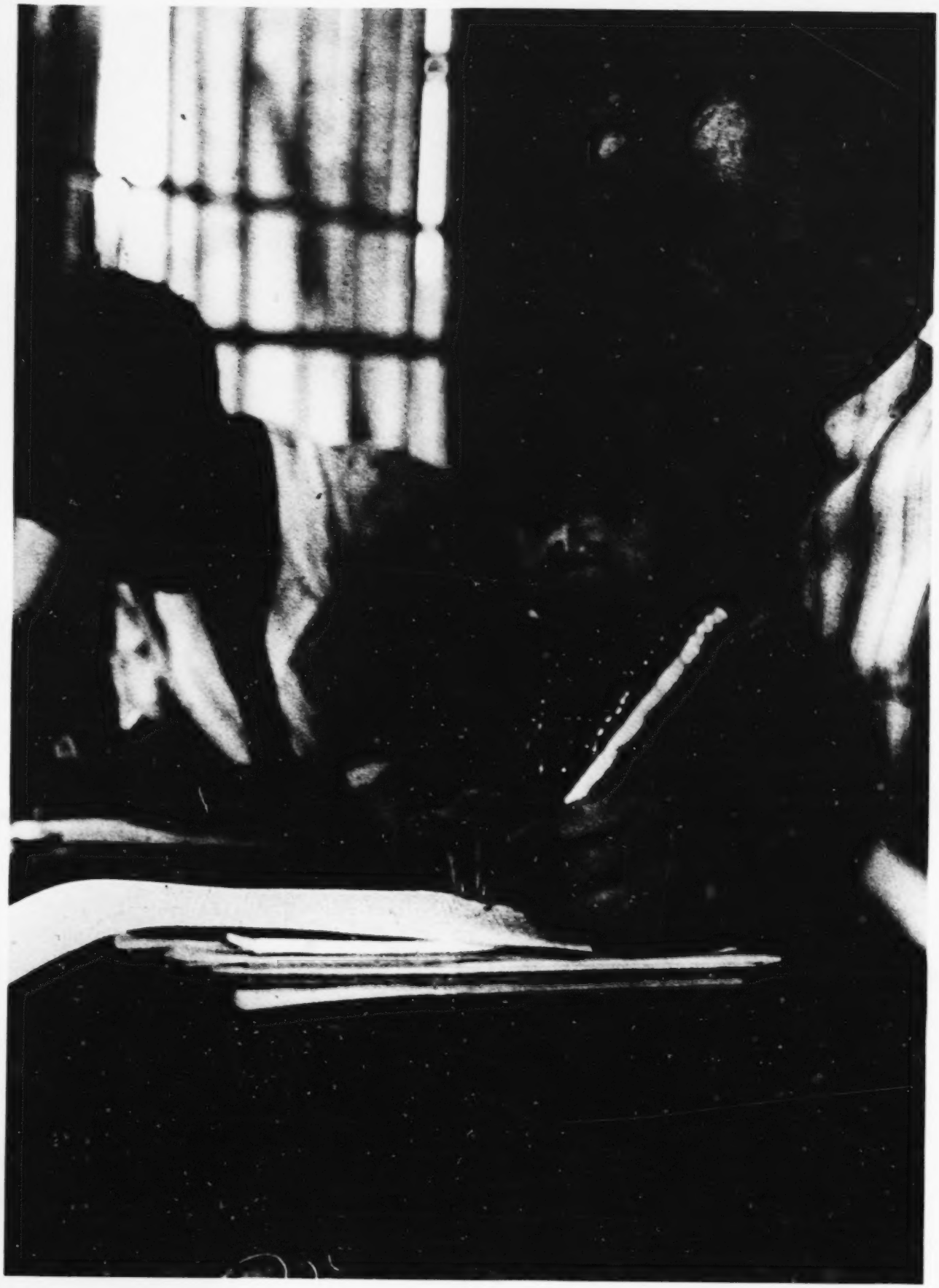
In highly industrialized nations, there are some notable exceptions to this correspondence between illiteracy and poverty. There *are* millionaires who cannot read or write; there *are* secondary school graduates with low reading levels either due to the poor quality of their schooling or to disinterest and disuse of reading in their daily lives. However, in general, the social distribution of literacy follows the same pattern as the distribution of other goods and benefits in any society. The majority of the world's illiterates are poor. Is illiteracy the cause of poverty, or is the opposite true? I propose to examine briefly some of the common myths about literacy/illiteracy in order to suggest some directions for policy and practice in relation to the concern for literacy.

Myth # 1

The Third World remains poor because the majority of the population is illiterate.

A large number of Third World countries justify their relatively large expenditures on adult literacy programs with the claim that this is the only way to proceed toward the transformation of their present subsistence economies into modern cash economies based on industrialization. Wealthy countries where the majority of the adult population is literate are their models. They have been led to believe that literacy, or education in general, is what produced modernization and high living standards. In actual fact, industrialization preceded higher levels of literacy in Europe and North America. Economic development and the hope of participating in its rewards caused literacy skills to be more highly prized and sought. No one will pursue literacy until there is evidence that rewards will actually be forthcoming in the form of access to and fair compensation for work and the possibility of an improved quality of life.

In China, prior to 1949, only some of the large landowners, government employees, and a small, relatively affluent professional class were literate. Internal and external oppressions had kept the masses poor and illiterate. Once the barriers to economic development were removed — and there continue to be many ups and downs in this process — a message of hope for the future was delivered



to the Chinese people along with the two great literacy campaigns. Adult education in China today has moved well beyond the provision of basic literacy. Continuing education is available to peasants and workers in the largest government-sponsored adult education system in the world. Modernization is providing tangible rewards in the new China; therefore, education has high priority for the whole population.

Sometimes, even before new economic opportunities are actually available, a major political change carries sufficient promise of inclusion in the future to motivate the masses to join in a literacy crusade. Nicaragua, Cuba, and Tanzania are examples. The invitation to join in building a new and just national society created an atmosphere of hope among the largely rural poor. They were ready to receive with enthusiasm the young tutors who flooded the countryside. Literacy crusades took on the character of a great national festival. People learned the rudiments of reading and writing by candlelight and, perhaps more importantly, told each other stories of the hope in their hearts.

Unless the hope engendered by radical political change can be sustained by tangible social and economic changes, the long road to advanced literacy will be abandoned. China has been able to keep those who started on this road to education from stopping along the way. Whether other nations with fewer natural resources or faced with strong external and internal opposition to change will be able to do the same remains to be seen. However, each of these cases demonstrates that it is by addressing, or giving clear promise of addressing, poverty itself that a nation creates the climate for literacy. Poverty is the underlying cause of illiteracy. Without any proven will or ability to break the chains of poverty, no government has been able to make significant progress toward universal literacy.

Myth #2

It is possible to rate the nations of the world on a scale that compares relative levels of literacy.

Various world bodies publish statistics purporting to show the literacy levels in every nation. The truth of the matter is, no internationally recognized inventory of skills exists by which to measure literacy. And even if there were, literacy is a moving target. Who needs what level of skills varies from one culture to another and within cultures. Depending on technological, economic, and cultural development, differing levels of proficiency are required to fulfill the needs of the society — not to mention of individuals.

An Indonesian villager and an urban Canadian will obviously require different literacy skills. Therefore, even if there were a way to evaluate and measure the literacy skills of two persons so distant from each other geographically and culturally, the result would tell us very little. It is like attempts to shock us by declaring that the average weekly wage of a peasant in northeastern Brazil is only two dollars. What does that mean in terms of buying power where he lives? In the same way, we must ask what people want to *do* with their literacy? What *can* they do in their own societies? These are the important questions and the answers differ from one place to another. They also differ over time. A Parisian in 1986 could hardly get along with the literacy skills of a sixteenth century Parisian. The examples are obvious, yet the arguments based on the assumption of universality and comparability for literacy requirements are heard everywhere.

Myth #3

What we need is a reliable definition of literacy.

For those newly aware of problems in the area of literacy, the absence of a clear definition often appears to be a significant hindrance to effective action. Objective, empirically precise data for judging a nation's level of literacy are impossible not only because of differing situations among nations but because no criteria exist even within a nation for determining what it means to be literate. It is possible, of course, to say how many people have completed a particular level of schooling, but given the differences in quality and standards even between schools (let alone among regions and countries), this statistic says nothing about literacy proficiency.

When adults are given passages to read in order to test their literacy level, what is actually revealed is their ability or inability to read the particular material provided. They are judged to be at a certain age or grade level on the basis of research done with children or on the basis of tasks considered important by literate test-makers. How these adults perform has little to do with their ability to carry out activities that are central to their lives. Nothing is learned about what *they* need or want to do with linguistic skills, nor whether they can function in the concrete settings of their own, everyday lives.

Most definitions that go beyond the basic ability to write one's name or read a simple paragraph stress something known as "functional literacy," that is, the ability to *use* linguistic skills. Kenneth Levine says that "literacy is the exercised capacity to acquire and exchange information via the written word. Functional literacy is the possession of — or access to — the competences and information required to accomplish those transactions entailing reading and writing in which an individual wishes — or is compelled — to engage."[1] Levine's definition and others that are similar clearly suggest that the ultimate arbiter of literacy is the individual living in a particular time and place and facing specific demands and opportunities. The context within which real adults demonstrate their competence and seek or give information is limited not only by their ability to read or write but by institutional factors that facilitate or hinder their access to information and knowledge.

If *access* is a key word in Levine's definition (as I believe it is) then we can look at literacy not only in terms of linguistic skills but in relation to whether or not certain categories of information or knowledge are available and whether these are freely shared within a society. In South Africa today, fluency in reading and writing does not make a person functionally literate according to this definition, because critical information is being denied to both readers and non-readers. South Africa may be an extreme example, but in countless societies, information is withheld from all or part of the population. Even in supposedly open democracies, the poor generally lack access to knowledge common among members of dominant cultural groups.

Because most of the interest in testing for and defining literacy has come from educators, psychologists, government employees responsible for adult education, and people with literacy programs that need funding, technical and linguistic skills have been stressed. The social dimension of the issue has not received attention. Yet it is precisely this dimension that is crucial to illiterate or semi-literate adults in their struggle to participate fully in the world around them. And it is this dimension that has — at least to date — defied measurement. The extent to which individuals desire or are compelled to gain and to share knowledge through reading and writing is not easily determined apart from the day-to- day context of their lives.

1. Levine, Kenneth. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 52, Number 3, 1982, pp. 263-264.
2. Thompson, Jane L. *Convergence*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1983, p. 46.

Is literacy really the issue?

If poverty and hopelessness about the possibility of a better future are the conditions that perpetuate illiteracy; if desirable/necessary levels of literacy differ according to time and place; and if knowledge and access to knowledge are more significant than linguistic skills in determining what constitutes functional literacy, then we must be talking about something deeper and more inclusive than reading and writing per se. The easy assumption that government sponsored campaigns or private sector projects to teach reading and writing will eradicate illiteracy by the year 2000 — or any other year — are ill-founded. What, then, can we do?

We know that in industrialized countries and in the metropolitan sector of certain Third World societies there are people whose limited literacy is the primary factor that keeps them from accomplishing personal objectives. Having diagnosed their own need, they are the people most likely to enter literacy programs. But we also know that their number is only a small proportion of those included in the statistics of the illiterate or semi-literate. Our primary concern in this paper is with that large majority who remain indifferent or hostile to literacy programs because they have other more urgent needs, affecting their very survival.

Perhaps a first step toward reaching the poorest of the poor might be to evaluate and, where necessary, seek to change our own attitudes and assumptions as policy-makers, program providers or practitioners. Are our programs, whether sponsored by public or private agencies, intended to teach reading so that the poor may more readily cope within existing structures? Is the intent of our programs merely to elicit passive behaviors and to encourage conformist responses by enabling learners to read instructions, labels, forms, and signs? *Or* do we intend that they will become full participants in and contributors to the processes of a democratic society? If the latter, then our programs will need to change considerably. The focus on remedial approaches and functional competence may "distract attention from the root causes of structural inequality and powerlessness within our society."[2]

The whole burden of policy decisions, program structure, approach and content has traditionally rested with the already highly educated who experience the issue of limited literacy essentially as outsiders. Those with low levels of literacy, whether the majority of the population, as in Third World nations, or the minority, as in industrialized countries, all share the same basic situation of poverty and exclusion unknown among educational program-providers. As a result, the poor already know a great deal more than we do about *what* might be done to change their lives.

A high degree of solidarity exists among the poor in most communities. Instead of agonizing over our inability to "reach" the poorest sectors of the population with *our* programs, we might discover with them what is already going on in communities and join our skills, information and access to resources with their efforts to bring about change. Mainstream educational structures with their emphasis on competitiveness and individualism are inappropriate for people made interdependent by necessity in their common life.

When program providers become partners and co-learners with community members, resulting activities seldom resemble traditional literacy programs. Economic development, the formation of cooperatives, the acquisition of bargaining and negotiating skills, organizing to gain access to health services, developing cultural projects when they are pursued in response to common interests of groups and communities provide the major settings for learning, both formal and nonformal. Communication skills — including writing, reading, mathematics — find their place on the agendas of action groups when they emerge as needed skills for the achievement of individual and community objectives. They do not, by themselves, provide the *raison d'etre* of the programs.

Long involvement in the debate over literacy/illiteracy and in the programs intended to benefit the educationally disadvantaged has convinced this writer that fundamental change in our basic approach is needed. Whether in the rural areas of the Third World or in urban enclaves in technologically advanced nations, literacy cannot be understood as a remedial program, designed and delivered by zealous missionaries to those "in need." Rather, literacy levels will increase where there is serious commitment to goals of equity and justice and where the educationally disadvantaged are able to be involved in shaping their own learning within the context of reshaping the social, political, economic, and cultural environment within which they live. If we are able to begin with programs that promote participation and direction by learners, that degree of openness can become a first step toward the larger, more socially and economically inclusive change that will provide the basis on which universal literacy can be realized.

It is not possible to do everything at once. It is possible to be very clear about what we are doing and why. Literacy is either a tool of oppression or liberation. Management and methodology contribute either to the increased dependence or to the empowerment of participants. Our decisions make a difference.

Carman St. John Hunter is a freelance consultant in popular education, literacy, and community development.

A Question of Survival

"Today, reading is as important as eating."

— a participant of the CLS program

by Klaudia Rivera

In the United States where education is a right and educational opportunity is mandated for all, are illiterates to blame for their lack of motivation? If the stories offered by several women participants of the Community Language Services Project in Corona, Queens, New York, are any indication, the answer to that question is "No." Conversations with these women, who are mainly Hispanic immigrants, show how the roots of illiteracy are entangled within the wider context of history, economics, and social and political structures. As Carman Hunter points out elsewhere in this issue (see "Literacy/Illiteracy in an International Perspective"), most people who are illiterate also share the common denominator of poverty, unemployment, poor housing, lack of adequate health care and, in general, little opportunity to participate fully in society.

The six women interviewed at Community Language Services all suffer from economic hardship and have experienced a range of problems, both social and cultural, in adjusting to their new society. Motivation to learn, however, is not among their difficulties. With the exception of one woman, all those interviewed had always wanted to know how to read. They knew they were missing something important in life and felt envious and curious of others' literacy skills. All the women saw education as a privilege, not a "right," and they had always hoped to return to school one day once they had bettered their lives. In order to do so, they realised that they must learn to read. The approach taken by the CLS project was vital to the educational needs of these women in their new country as it offered them the opportunity to begin reading in Spanish at the same time as learning to speak English.

The women talked about their childhood and their parents who, in most cases, were not literate. (Usually, the father had limited formal education and the mother had none.) In some of their native countries, the women noted, they were expected to marry as early as possible, not to become educated. It was considered more important to learn to cook, sew and iron than to learn to read. After a certain age, it was considered inapprop-

riate for women to spend time outside of their homes, and, as a result, they had little opportunity for schooling.

Once in their new country, some of the women interviewed continued to struggle to become literate. The women now understand only too well the relationship between the ability to read and independence. For illiterates who are not fluent in English, it is impossible to "fake" literacy skills, as do some illiterate native speakers of English. Thus, many of the women have had to rely on their children to function in a society that demands literate skills. What increased their dependency, however, was their reliance on children for translation, as well. This double dependency made the exercise of their traditional parental role extremely difficult. In addition to having their parental powers eroded, the women found it difficult. The women also found it difficult to overcome the strong traditional beliefs of their husbands. The husbands felt that all their women needed to know was how to take care of husbands and family, and, for this, there was no need of schooling.

One woman, who had to take care of younger siblings in her youth rather than attend school, stated that her husband feels threatened by her involvement in an educational program. He fears she will no longer have to depend on him. She constantly invites her husband to enroll in the program but he refuses.

Because of their roles as mothers as well as workers, the women noted that access to a community-based program has proven to be an essential ingredient for attendance. They would not have been able to learn to read and write had a program not been available in the community where they lived. Between working at wage labor outside of their homes and taking care of children, they had neither the time nor energy to travel in the evening to attend classes. Also, the proximity of the school is critical in case of an emergency at home.

The women have had difficulty finding a program that gave them the right mixture of support and skills training they desired. All the women interviewed indicated that they wanted to learn to read in Spanish. Two of the women had been looking for a Spanish program for a very long time. Prior to coming to Community Language Services, they had enrolled in programs for English as a Second Language, but had dropped out because the programs used materials and methods that assumed students were already literate in their native language.

When asked what impact a literacy program will have on their lives, they responded that they could:

- function more independently,
- help their children with school work
- have better jobs,
- pursue other types of educational opportunities, including attending college, and
- negotiate the housing and health-care systems more effectively.

Of equal importance to the women was their new ability to contribute to the development of their communities. Responses varied widely when asked how literacy skills would enable them to help their communities. Some of the women suggested they could teach others their newly acquired skills, others focused on assisting their neighbors when visiting the doctor or governmental agencies. All felt that through literacy they would help their communitites develop economically, including lobbying for better schools for their children, better housing, and more effective delivery of social services.

This particular group of women has always had the desire to learn how to read, but they have never had the opportunity. Most of them have not had a negative experience with formal education, because they have had none. Although the level of mastery of reading and writing skills required to function in their native country may differ from that required in the US, there is no difference in their life-long wish to aquire an education. Their migration to a more technologically complex society, however, made education not just a privilege, but a question of survival. What motivates these adult learners is the need to learn English, to help their children in school, to find employment, to live in better housing and in general, to attain a better standard of living. According to one of the women, "Today, reading is as important as eating." Unfortunately, simply learning to read will not change the social and economic hardships they confront, since these hardships relate not so much to individual motivation but to the economic, social, and political structures of society.

Community Language Services

Community Language Services (CLS) is a community-based project with offices at La Guardia Community College in Queens, New York. Currently, there are 100 mainly Hispanic women enrolled who attend classes at centers in their communities in East Harlem and Corona, Queens.

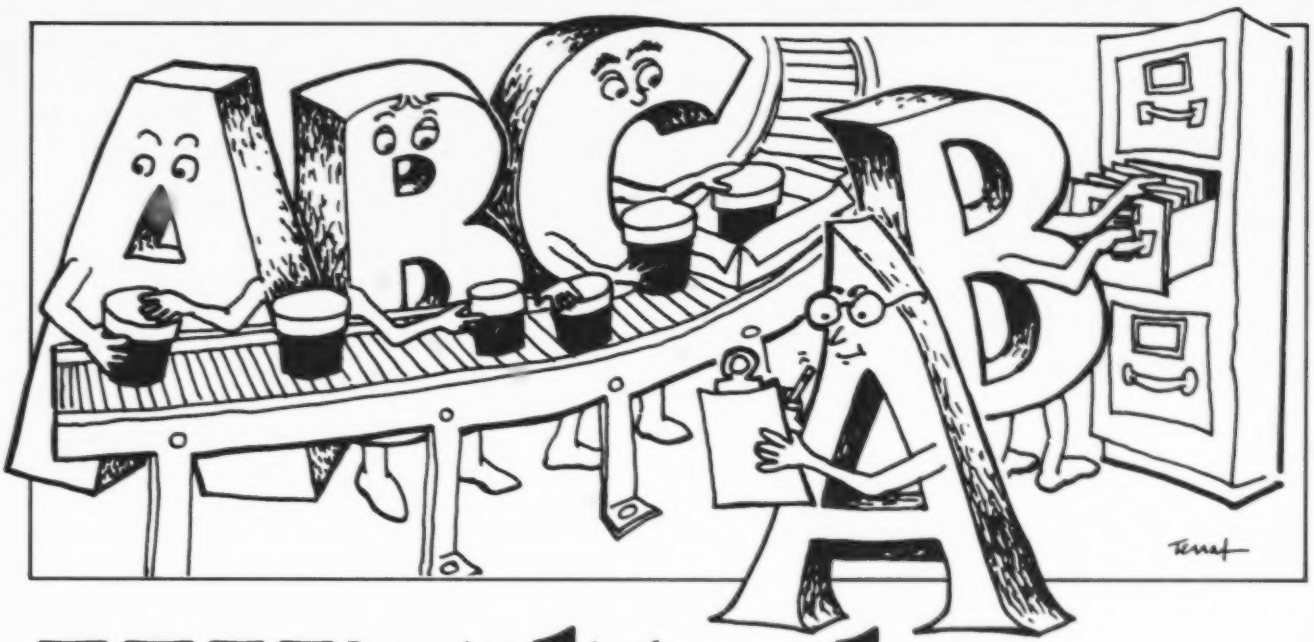
The principal goal of the program is to assist learners to develop their individual potential and to encourage them to develop bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate skills. Due to the kinds of problems that participants confront daily, the project must do more than merely teach students how to read and write; it must prepare them to negotiate the labyrinth of their new society in order to survive.

CLS uses a collective approach to learning. Individuals are responsible not only for their own learning but for that of the whole group. For example, students are often prevented from attending class because of problems with jobs or family obligations. An absent student may catch up during informal social gatherings, in individual meetings with other students, or during class sessions with the rest of the class. In this way, learning becomes only one of many instances in which community members depend on each other.

Learners are encouraged to participate actively in the design and implementation of the program. In the classroom, dialogue is emphasized. Outside of the classroom, students evaluate program materials for their use and meaningfulness to their daily lives, and they contribute to the decisions made about program direction. This creative and self-critical process is considered crucial to the program's success.

The program offers basic education in Spanish, and all the classes have a component of English as a Second Language. All basic skills are first introduced in Spanish and once mastered, reintroduced in English. Daily activities involve class discussion of a particular topic of interest to the group and the students then practice reading and writing exercises based on this discussion. Other activities include presentations of popular theater and exercises that encourage independent and critical thinking.

Klaudia Rivera is a community and adult educator with a special interest in international literacy issues and the policies concerned with the education of minority groups.



Learning in the Workplace

Finding the "propitious moment" to link education with specific situations

by David Harman

Corporate education and training activities around the United States have burgeoned over the past decade to a point where they form a virtually new and formidable educational system. Over 200,000 companies are providing a plethora of educational and training opportunities to approximately 12-15 million people each year, at a staggering cost estimated to fall between 50 and 100 billion dollars.

Training in the workplace is by no means a new phenomenon; American industry has engaged in educational work for over a century. In their earliest days, these efforts took form in "Factory Schools," which sought to impart both technical skills and basic education to new employees who had neither. By 1912, so many such schools were in operation that they formed the National Association of Factory Schools, later to become the American Management Association.

In theory, the growth of the formal school system and the addition of vocational and technical components to school curriculum should have obviated the need for workplace courses. Indeed, although never quite disappearing, corporate educational activities languished for several decades, exploding again only in the post-World War II era, precisely when more Americans had acquired more formal schooling than ever before.

Form Follows Function

Virtually unknown and only marginally researched, the corporate educational enterprise has no fixed curricula and, with minor exceptions, grants no degrees; its form and substance are largely dictated by a combination of need and the predilections of senior corporate executives. In general, the corporate curriculum can be divided into three categories. Lower-level employees with jobs in technical or mechanical areas are trained in the specific tasks their responsibilities demand. Mid-level managers and supervisors can take advantage of a rainbow of managerial and business related subjects. Even less specific are the courses, conferences, and programs through which top management is usually "developed." No matter the level, from training to development, all curricula concern developing and improving certain skills related to literacy.

It is now widely agreed that literacy is not a fixed inventory of skills, but a variable concept dependent on a specific context. Consequently, diverse definitions of literacy exist, each of which seeks to match the reading and writing requisites of a particular situation with the ability of the individuals who have to function within that context. As people move from

one set of conditions to another, the literacy skills required may change. Beyond the technical mastery of letters of the alphabet and the ability to encode and decode combinations of letters into words, literacy connotes the ability to extract meaning from texts and convey meaning through written material. This, in turn, necessitates a knowledge of vocabulary and of background information — knowledge that is linked to specific environments.

Tacitly accepting this notion, corporations have instituted several types of literacy programs, albeit many are not labelled as such. Basic literacy courses are often made available to lower level employees, with the intention of developing their literacy skills to equivalencies approximately between sixth and tenth grade. These programs are the same as the many adult basic education and high school equivalency courses offered by public and voluntary agencies. They tend to be "generic" rather that specific. Some evidence — largely anecdotal — indicates that literacy classes are more effective when conducted under the aegis of the workplace rather than by an outside agency. If this is the case, one might surmise that the location with its close connection to work and livelihood, coupled with the positive pressures of peers, contribute to this success.

Mid- and top-level management are offered a variety of "executive writing" programs that focus attention on issues such as report and memoranda writing, "executive" letter writing, reading and summarizing internal communications, and the like. Never called "literacy," such courses are, in fact, aimed at improving the abilities of participants in what are definitely literacy skills. Their efficacy is not known as evaluation studies are simply not available. The mere fact that such courses are conducted, however, indicates a need and, of course, confirms the existence of a problem.

Compensation or Continuation?

A question arises as to why such educational activities are being conducted in the workplace and not in schools. Are workplaces reacting to a perceived inability of schools to impart literacy skills and, hence, reluctantly serving in a compensatory role? Or can literacy only develop properly within certain contexts that demand its existence, foremost among which is the workplace? The answer can be found somewhere in the middle. Schools are limited in what they can accomplish by the nature of the socio-economic and cultural environments in which they function. Within those environments where literacy is neither appreciated nor required, schools understandably find it difficult to impart seemingly "unnecessary" skills. However, it would be unfair and incorrect to lay all of the blame for learning failure at the doorstep of formal education.

When the graduates of these hapless institutions enter the labor market and find that they are deficient in their abilities and cannot adequately carry out their duties, they realise the need for and become more receptive to instruction and learning. As they climb the workplace ladder, workers are motivated to acquire more complex abilities as new tasks are demanded of them. This demonstrates that no "right" time to teach or acquire literacy exists; instead "propitious" moments arise, which are variable and depend upon people's specific situations.

Benefiting Individuals, Employers, Society

Far from being compensatory or supplementary, programs in the workplace that foster abilities in literacy and other basic skills are an absolute necessity, and the corporate role should be broadened and possibly even systematized. Such programs benefit individuals, benefit their employers, and benefit society. It would be spurious to argue that they are a form of worker "domestication" or that they replace other legitimate benefits of employment. Surely, literacy and basic skills instruction is as germane to proper workplace functioning as are courses in technical and business matters. None would argue that these latter subjects are a benefit to employees; rather, they are a necessary aspect of the conduct of business, as are basic skills.

The corporate classroom can no longer be treated as a passing fashion. It has fast asserted for itself a vital and central position in the newly emergent model of lifelong and continuing education. It is not a new form of "second chance" education, but has become the forefront of normative educational practice. This new norm has altered the traditional pattern of "up-front," or preparatory education, establishing in its stead a contextually-determined, ongoing process of learning, one better suited to the constantly and rapidly evolving character of our times.

David Harman is a Professor of Education at Teacher's College, Columbia University and president of the Institute for Corporate Education. His new book, *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*, has just been released (see back cover for further information).

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Working Together

by David Walker with John Comings

Until recently, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have not played an active role in the development of national policies or programs in Third World countries. The importance of translating the lessons learned from successful small-scale projects to the national level has led many organizations to foster closer alliances with government agencies. NGO programs are usually more flexible, more innovative and more responsive to the needs of particular communities than are government efforts. National governments, however, are able to command greater resources and reach a wider audience than NGOs. The Nepal National Literacy Program is a valuable example of how the strengths of the Ministry of Education combined with those of World Education and other non-governmental organizations to produce an effective national effort.

Except in times of radical social upheaval (as occurred in Cuba and Nicaragua), national governments have rarely provided the resources needed to design and implement effective, large-scale adult literacy programs. Circumstances in Nepal were unusual in that the government acknowledged its limitations and accepted the contributions of World Education in strengthening its adult education program. World Education and other NGOs benefited from the government's efforts because materials and methods that proved successful in pilot projects were made available to all organizations through the government at low cost. For the first time, many NGOs could offer literacy as part of their programs.

One might feel smug if the success of Nepal's literacy program were due to careful planning and foresight; however, the conditions that led to success developed somewhat by chance. With hope, the experiences described here can reveal important lessons for future — and less fortuitous — collaborative efforts between governments and NGOs in other countries.

The Pilot Project

In 1979 World Education, with a grant from USAID, embarked on a modest pilot project to develop and test a curriculum and materials for a nonformal adult education project. At the time, Nepal's literacy rate was estimated at about 24%, due in large part to the increased number of children attending primary schools throughout the Kingdom over the past three decades. Though adult literacy had also been part of Nepal's agenda for that thirty-year period, it took a back seat to the development of the formal educational system.

The Nonformal Education Program did not start out as a literacy project at all, but rather as a more general rural development program. Its overall goal was to make individuals and communities more aware of development strategies through organizing communities and raising consciousness. Literacy, according to the prevailing thinking of the time, was largely irrelevant for subsistence farmers living in isolated rural villages. Early materials were designed to provoke discussion, encourage awareness of community problems, and teach planning skills. A range of materials, such as posters, open-ended stories, flexiflans, puppets, and rubber stamps were tested with twenty learning groups in four areas of the country.

The subsistence farmers in Nepal proved to be an exception to the development thinking of the day. As Hindus and Buddhists, they had a rich scriptural heritage and an ancient tradition of literacy. For them, education was not conscious-

NGOs Helped the Government of Nepal to Strengthen its National Literacy Program

ness-raising, but the ability to read and write. Furthermore, the villagers wanted a tangible skill. Although participants in all of the centers enjoyed the creativity and diversity of the materials, they wanted to know when they would start learning to read and write. To take advantage of their interest, the project staff shifted the focus of their activities towards literacy and searched for successful literacy programs to emulate.

A Search for Exemplary Programs

In Nepal, very little work in adult literacy had been undertaken. The Ministry of Education's Functional Literacy Program was largely ineffective. It tried to cover too large an area with too few staff. Furthermore, the Ministry's materials and the phonetic approach on which they were based did not mesh with World Education's objective of fostering awareness of development concerns.

The Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SATA) was experimenting with a "keyword" approach. This presented the letters of the Devanagri script through commonly used words. Each participant was given a handmade wooden box with dozens of syllable cards. It took weeks of training, however, for the facilitator to learn how to use these materials properly, and despite the innovativeness of the approach, World Education felt it was too complicated and expensive to be replicated on a national scale.

The project staff was more enthusiastic about a program being run by the Catholic Church out of Hayden Hall in Darjeeling, India. The program taught Nepali using the keyword approach with two small booklets. The keywords used in the Darjeeling program (such as *garib*, poverty; *paisa*, money; *kam*, work) lent themselves to a discussion of village problems and ways of solving them. Though the materials were limited, the approach appeared to be appropriate. Nepal needed something more substantial than the Darjeeling program but less complicated than SATA's. It was evident that the project would have to develop its own materials.

A Move to the Ministry

During the first year, the project experimented with a wide range of materials and produced a detailed description of its activities in a journal, *Education for Development*, published by the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID). While World Education's pilot project was officially signed with the Ministry of Education, the Minister had decided to hand the project over to CERID, a university research center, as he was aware that the center's atmosphere would be more supportive of experimentation than the bureaucracy in the Ministry. The article in CERID's journal aroused considerable interest in the development community — particularly at the Ministry of Education, where a new Minister had since taken charge.

With the hope that the Adult Education Section might be strengthened, the new Minister requested that the program move back from CERID to the Ministry. The move came as a surprise, if not a shock, because no definitive program as yet existed. In fact, the materials were

A discussion poster for Lesson One around the keyword *kam* (work). The poster focuses on how natural objects (stone, mud, and wood) are transformed into something important and useful (a house) through work.

being completely revised based on the first year's experience.

At the time of the move to the Ministry, the Adult Education Section was overwhelmed with work on its own Functional Literacy Program. The project staff of the experimental program were not called upon immediately to work with the Adult Education Section; rather, they were able to develop, test and revise the materials and methods before activities were implemented on a larger scale. (All of the project staff were Nepali, except for one expatriate advisor, and, aside from the advisor, none had had previous background in nonformal education methodology.)

Although operating inside the Ministry, the project was not included in the Ministry's budget during that year. No funds existed to hire teachers, so the staff undertook all aspects of project activities including teaching classes, training teachers, supervising teaching, as well as developing the curriculum and materials. The opportunity to teach what they had developed proved to be both an ideal training experience for the staff and an excellent opportunity for refining the materials.

The project staff wanted to preserve the discussion and awareness-raising aspects of the earlier materials, and so the new materials were designed to begin with some of the more successful discussion posters. These posters were associated with keywords and simple reading passages based on the letters introduced by each lesson. Eventually games, comics, creative writing exercises, puzzles and a host of other elements were added to encourage participation, discussion and critical thinking.

By 1984, the staff was preparing the fourth revision of its materials, and loose-leaf sheets that had been used for testing were being compiled into booklets. The project eventually planned to publish four booklets of 96 pages each.

Book One had just come off the press when the Ministry announced that the experimental materials would replace those being used in the National Functional Literacy Program. The Ministry needed the other three books immediately. The project staff had spent months revising the materials for Book One, redrawing many of the pictures, improving the stories, and adding useful activities. Suddenly, the other three-quarters of the course had to be rushed to completion as the program was to be run on a vastly expanded scale.

While the students were finishing Book One, Books Two and Three were rushed through the press. Over the next two years, all four books were published and revised. By 1986, classes in 30 of Nepal's 75 districts were using the pilot project's materials and methods.

Back to Basics

As the Ministry of Education began to take responsibility for implementing the Nonformal Education Program, World Education began a second project in collaboration with two Nepalese organizations, NewERA and the Women Services Coordination Committee. Funding continues to be provided by Private Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT) and private contributions. The objective of this second effort was to increase the participation of girls and women in the National Literacy Campaign. In Nepal there are six times as many illiterate women as men and it was felt that a special effort was needed to encourage literacy activities which would attract women. The project worked on improving training for facilitators and also on experimenting with women facilitators. Ways were also sought to involve learners in post-literacy activities such as daycare centers and small income-generation projects. These classes were run in cooperation with local NGOs such as Mother's Clubs and the Women's Development Association.

Two literacy centers served as testing sites where supplementary class materials, evaluation procedures and a new training package were developed and tested. Because World Education had participated in the design of the original program, both the facilitator's guidebook and some of the supplementary materials developed in the new project were directly incorporated into the Ministry's national efforts.

Conclusions and Considerations

Although unexpected, the events that made a national program from a small pilot project occurred in large part because World Education was working within the Ministry of Education. The move to the Ministry provided the program with two important strengths. First, the Ministry did not have the manpower to monitor the project closely. This allowed the project staff the independence to experiment, test and revise their materials. The program was already well developed by the time it was "discovered." If the project had been under an obligation to produce the finished program all at once, it would not have been nearly as effective because little time could have been devoted to experimentation. Secondly, from the time the program was brought back to the Ministry, the experimental activities were seen as part of the government's programs. Had the project not been in the Ministry itself, there is little likelihood it would ever have reached national stature.

Successful collaboration has led the Ministry to seek additional assistance from other NGOs. Development of effective materials can be particularly time-consuming, and the Ministry sought to complement its own research and development efforts with those of other organizations. Save the Children Federation (an international private and voluntary organization) had prepared a set of materials for new literates, but found them prohibitively expensive to reproduce in the limited quantity needed for the areas served. The Ministry agreed to publish the materials in quantity and make them available to Save the Children and other NGOs at a greatly reduced cost.

Furthermore, the Ministry has recognized that NGOs are able to run literacy classes more effectively than the government. Small programs can be adapted to local conditions and classes can be supervised more effectively. Literacy classes are often run in conjunction with other activities in the community. The Ministry has encouraged NGOs to use the Nonformal Education Program and offers training and materials to NGO staff at cost. Because the materials are inexpensive (only $0.25 for each 96-page book), many NGOs are now able to include literacy training in their programs. This has had a profound effect on NGO activities. Of the classes being run in 1986/87 more than sixty percent are being run by NGOs and less than forty percent by the government.

The experience in Nepal shows that national governments and NGOs can collaborate successfully. By inviting an NGO inside the official government structure, government programs can be implemented more efficiently, and new energy and creativity can be injected into an often inflexible bureaucracy. For their part, NGOs can learn how better to adapt their experience in the field to the exigencies of working on a national level. Operating within the government builds a base of support for sustaining programs once they are beyond the initial, experimental phase. Also, collaboration ensures that consideration of the national scale is incorporated at all stages of program design and revision. World Education's work with the Ministry of Education demonstrates that both flexibility and credibility are essential to an NGO's success when working with national governments. Credibility assures that the government will accept the work of the NGO, while flexibility allows the NGO to adapt to the government's needs at short notice.

David Walker was World Education's Resident Advisor in Nepal from 1978 to 1986. **John Comings** is a Senior Program Officer of World Education.

Literacy Leads the Way in Saam Njaay

A literacy program in Senegal transforms the lives of villagers... and the thinking of development workers

by Molly Melching

None of us on the team of the Saam Njaay Literacy Program expected literacy to transform both the lives of the villagers and our own ideas about development, but so it did. In fact, the program came about almost by chance, growing out of a rural management project funded by USAID and implemented by the Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée (ENEA), a Senegalese government junior college for development workers. ENEA had contracted me, Bolle Mbaye, and Malick Pouye to assist people in the village of Saam Njaay to plan, implement and fund their own community development projects.

When we arrived in Saam Njaay, literacy training was not on the agenda of the rural development program, and we had not considered literacy as significant for the villagers. Because no one was literate in either French or Wolof (the maternal language of the villagers), the project team had planned to experiment with theater, puppets, radio and techniques based on traditional culture. We had used many similar methods over a period of six years out of a cultural center we had established in Dakar, and these nonformal education techniques had proven successful in the past to help villagers identify their needs and plan community projects. We were surprised when the villagers in Saam Njaay expressed a desperate desire to learn to read and write. "Literacy brings progress," they insisted.

The language of progress the villagers initially had in mind was French. Since colonial days, mastery of reading and writing in French had meant the possibility of paid employment or, more importantly, a job in the civil service in Dakar, Senegal's capital.

Our team pointed out the large number of unemployed, educated people in the cities and the number of years required to become functionally literate in French. We did not want to dampen the enthusiasm for literacy; in fact, we saw this as an opening for broader community development efforts. With the villagers, we examined the advantages of learning Wolof, and they became increasingly excited to discover that in only a matter of months they would be able to write letters, understand receipts and forms (for selling their millet and peanuts) and manage their own village projects. The villagers unanimously chose to begin classes in Wolof.

Building from Tradition

Because there was no public meeting room in Saam Njaay, our first lessons were taught in the back courtyard of a village compound. The methods we used

Villagers in Saam Njaay gather around a display of batik, including a hand-painted alphabet used to promote literacy.

were inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, and Sylvia Ashton Warner, author of *Teacher*. Many of the first materials were adapted from those developed by the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Most participants (men, women and children, aged 10-60) had never seen a text in Wolof, so we began by helping them become familiar with letters of the Wolof alphabet. We toured the village and found familiar objects that resembled letters.

We helped everyone practice writing circles and lines until they were used to holding pencils. Then, each participant chose a favorite word to learn. Many selected their own name or words that had meaning for them in their daily lives: water, peanuts, cooking pot, mosque. We gave each person his or her word and asked them to copy it several times. Each participant discussed why it was important to be able to write their word. The artist on our team, Malick Pouye, drew pictures of the objects represented by the words and tested the drawings for intelligibility and clarity. With these words, we constituted a basic village vocabulary, from which we adapted traditional Wolof games to reinforce word-recognition and spelling.

To learn the alphabet, we used a Senegalese "nonsense" song which had been popular with the children at our Dakar center. By substituting Wolof letters for the words, the rhymes and rhythms of this song soon captivated the whole village and everyone quickly learned the song and the alphabet. A children's game called "Father Watermelon" was also used to learn the alphabet. When a visitor asked an older learner, Cheikh Tidine Ndiaye if he minded playing "games," he replied that because of these "games" he could now sign his name. "After 54 years, that's the only thing that matters to me!" he exclaimed.

Changing the Village

As time went by, it became evident to everyone involved in the literacy program that the benefits of reading and writing were far greater than any of the team had originally expected. After only five months, many villagers had begun writing letters. Two young men attended a seminar on animal fattening, took notes, and upon their return, shared the information with their neighbors. Other villagers started recording village births, deaths, meetings, as well as cultural, religious and social events. A village woman, Fatma Ndiaye, attended literacy classes and then moved to another village when she married; she now writes letters and sends messages to her family and friends in Saam Njaay.

As they acquired new literacy skills, the villagers also gained new confidence in themselves and their ability to change village conditions. When the environment was the theme of one literacy meeting, the women talked of the shortage of firewood in the area. They often walked many kilometers to find firewood, and, in so doing, contributed to the continuing deforestation of their area. The recent drought had eroded the soil and little vegetation remained in the surrounding area. The women were interested in learning how trees enrich the soil, how they bring more rain and how they act as wind-breaks to protect crops.

After a visit to the nearby Forestry Department and further discussion among themselves, a group of villagers wrote a play with some assistance from the team. Their play told of the dangers of deforestation, the need to plant village woodlots and the advantages of constructing "ban ak suuf" (clay and sand) stoves to cut down on wood consumption. Each actor copied and read the script, then memorized his or her role. In addition to a presentation in Wolof for the national "Day of Trees" ceremony, the play was broadcast several times over national radio. The villagers also worked on an exhibit that was subsequently used as the basis for an educational brochure on

Literacy Begins at Home

Drawings of simple village objects helped learners become familiar with the shapes of letters of the alphabet.

trees printed by the National Forestry Department.

As a result of these and other educational activities, the villagers planted a village woodlot and constructed more than 50 clay and sand stoves in five surrounding villages. Other villages in the area also planted woodlots for the next rainy season, following the example of Saam Njaay.

New Paths to Health

While in Saam Njaay, we awoke one morning to the cries of Ndag Njaay, a 19 year-old girl who lived in our compound. From a small cut, Ndag had developed an abcess on her finger which one of the older men had tried to lance with an unsterilized razor blade. Ndag had a high fever and was in great pain. Because her family does not own a horse and cart, Ndag would have had to have walked to the nearest dispensary in Thiès, 12 kilometers away. I took Ndag to Thiès that morning and loaned her the money for her doctor bill and medicine: 12.560 FCFA ($40) for a family whose income is approximately 50.000 FCFA ($160) a year. Ndag was not able to work for three weeks, at a time when her family greatly needed her help.

That night, the villagers held a meeting in the village literacy center to discuss this and other common health problems in the village. The team learned that two years earlier, villagers had contributed money to buy medicine and the government had provided furniture and some equipment for a "health hut" in the neighboring village of Ker Assane. Now the Ker Assane "health hut" was occupied by chickens, and the villagers' money had long since disappeared.

In Saam Njaay, people were understandably reluctant to discuss a new "health hut." Nonetheless, we decided to continue working on health issues. We found educational materials on malaria prevention and treatment, which we adapted as part of the literacy program. Little by little, the villagers realized that they themselves could start up a health program without necessarily building a "hut."

They selected a health committee, and the head of each household contributed 1,000 FCFA ($2.50) to buy medicines to treat the most common illnesses of the village (malaria, wounds, diarrhea, and conjunctivitis). Yaaba Njaay volunteered to administer basic health care in his hut, and Yacine Diop was chosen by the women to train as a midwife in Thiès.

The *Medicin Chef* of the Thiès region encouraged their initiative, allowed them to buy medicine at the medical center at a lower cost, and instructed Yaaba in primary health care while he was waiting to train as an *Agent de Santé Communautaire* in Thiès. Because of his earlier literacy instruction, Yaaba was able to record the name, age, sickness and treatment for each patient. Because the other villagers were literate as well, they could control the finances administered by the health committee.

The benefits of the health program were soon obvious to everyone involved. The villagers were able to save the time and money needed for trips to distant health care centers for treatment of malaria or minor injuries. The records also show that the cases of conjunctivitis were reduced considerably in the following months. On Yaaba's return from his training in Thiès, several representatives from surrounding villages came to Saam Njaay to request participation in the health program. The committee wrote a proposal in Wolof for the construction of a "health hut," which they submitted to the Self-Help fund of the US Embassy in Dakar. The project was approved and the building completed in November 1984.

The health education program led to the training of a village health educator who volunteered to go to surrounding villages to present the health materials developed in Saam Njaay. This *sensibilisation*, as well as the proper management of the new "health hut," led many more villages to request participation in the Saam Njaay program. At the time of this writing, nineteen villages belong to the "health hut," while in Saam Njaay, Yaaba continues to keep an open record of patients, medicines and money.

"Saam Njaay will never be the same!"

After spending two years in the village, our team left Saam Njaay in October of 1985. Improvement in health was just one aspect of change during our stay. With funding from Africare, many villagers had begun vegetable gardening to earn an income during the dry season; their ability to read and write enabled them both to improve vegetable production and to better manage their funds.

The number of activities related to literacy has continued to grow during our absence. On a recent visit, we found the health committee preparing a nineteen village anti-malaria campaign for the rainy season, a group of young men studying the possibility of a soap-making project, and the women dancing because they had made a large profit off of their vegetable garden. Plans were also being discussed to meet requests for literacy training in neighboring villages.

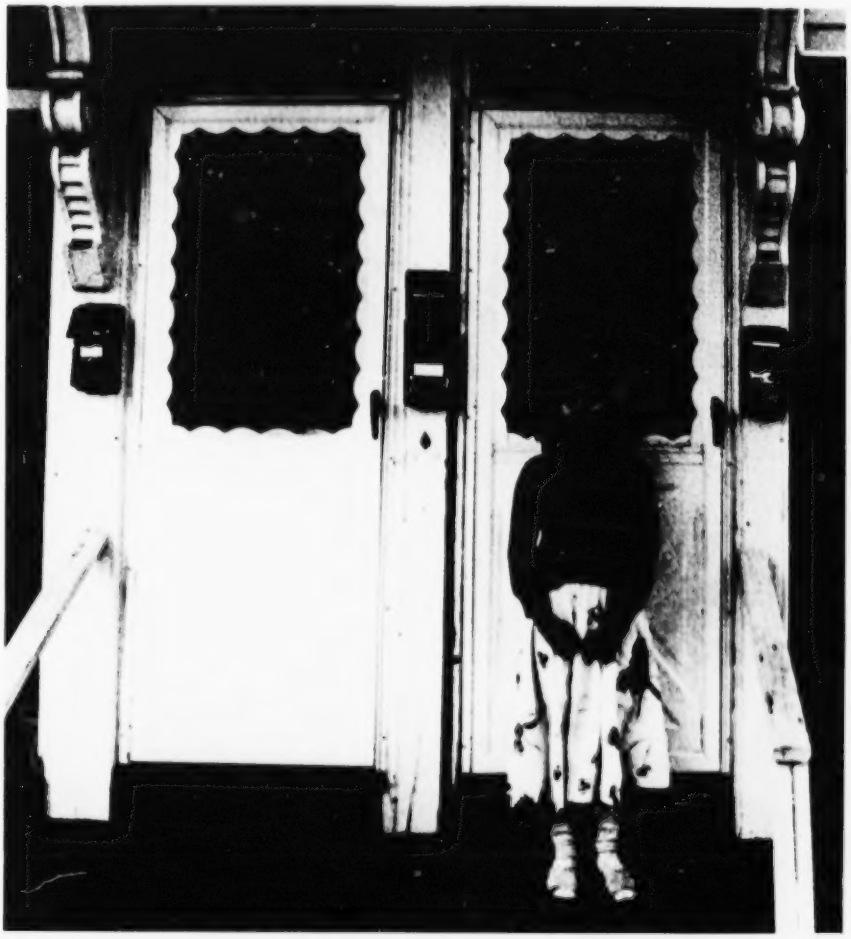
As we were leaving, Mbaye Sy Ndiaye took out a book in Wolof and started reading to us. We were stunned; Mbaye Sy, who was 57 years old, had never shown an interest in the literacy classes when we were there. "I guess I had to be shown that it was really worth my time to learn to read and write, but there is no doubt now! All of us who were not in the original program have asked our neighbors to teach us so that we can make the progress they have made. Even people from surrounding villages come here to learn! Saam Njaay will never be the same!"

Molly Melching has lived in Senegal for 12 years, working for the past six at a cultural center in Dakar. She specializes in exploring nonformal education using culturally-appropriate means.

Acculturation is a Very Big Word

Learning English is not simply a matter of reading for Southeast Asian Refugees

by David Moffat
with Wendy Walker



It is the type of house we might never have noticed if we had not had to find it. The address is on Crane Street, but there is no such street sign. People walking in the neighborhood do not know what to tell us; the attendant at the local gas station comes from another part of town.

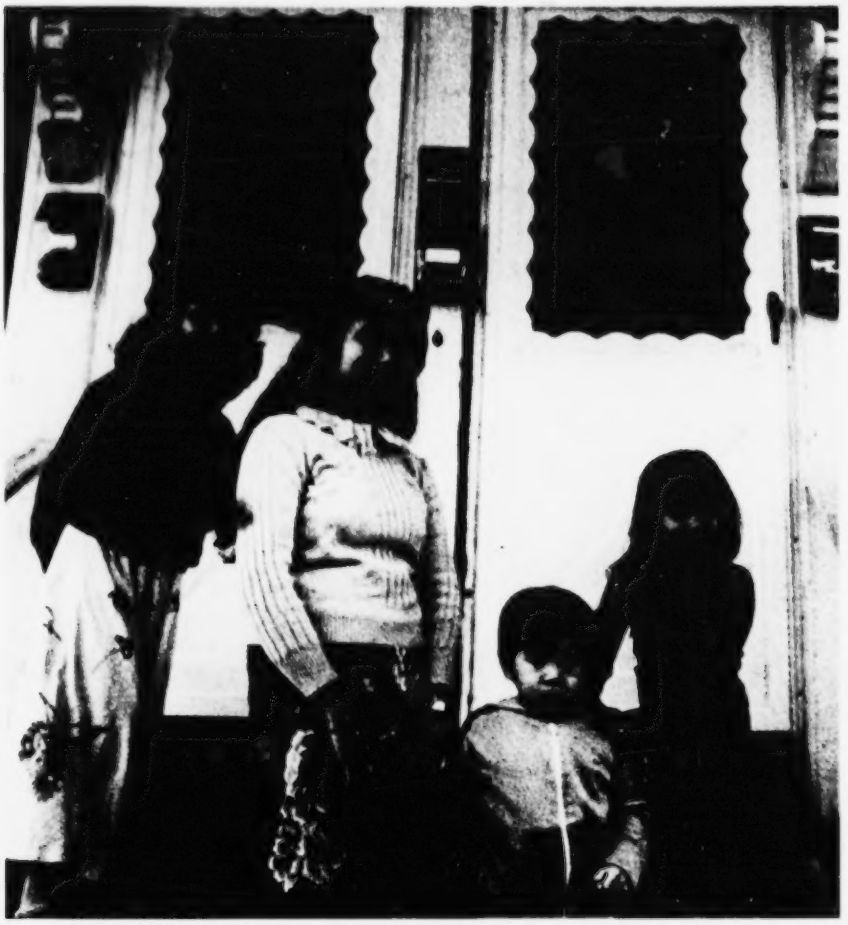
On a hunch, we drive down a dead-end street. An Hispanic family outside a sad-faced bungalow guesses what we must be looking for. The house on the corner — the one we've driven by twice — is a featureless, clapboard box on a high foundation with four identical doors and four cheap, hooded letterboxes.

Chip, a 16-year old Cambodian, lives in one of the apartments in the house. Like many Indochinese refugees, she is struggling to adapt to a radically new way of life in the folds and corners of a world we take for granted. Life in Cambodia was based on simple harmonies: fishing, farming, and family coupled with occasional, rarely overwhelming, commerce.

Americans, on the other hand, live in a tangle of abstract and technological relations. Social scientists believe many of the assumptions that underlie our culture are imbedded in our language. They say the process of learning English can provide Southeast Asian refugees with their first giant step toward acculturation. Chip has agreed to explain what learning English has meant to her.

Photo above:

Chip and other Cambodians in Lowell, Massachusetts are only the most recent arrivals in a community occupied for generations by new immigrants.



The story of 16-year old, Chip, and her friend Chantha is typical of Cambodian refugees who have recently arrived in the United States.

Chip's Story

Chip was worried we would not come. She shows us down the hallway past six or eight hollow-core doors the landlord left unhung before leaving for Florida. The landlord also forgot to give her a key to the new front door, Chip says. Inside her apartment, the air is fragrant with the sweet aroma of recently-cooked Thai rice. The living room is furnished with straight-backed kitchen chairs and a sofa made from several old mattresses and a wooden bedframe.

Chip begins her story, answering our questions in a small, timid voice. She shares the apartment with her sister and a Cambodian friend. The sister is not home because she works at an electronics assembly plant. But Chantha, the friend, is there. Her two young children sprawl beside her watching Donald Duck on the Disney Channel. She is 22, and has been in the United States longer than Chip. She helps Chip where she can, providing pieces from her own story to fill the gaps.

Chip's mother died when she was five; she never knew what happened to her father. By the time she was old enough to go to school, the Khmer Rouge had done away with schools.

"They don't want the children to study, because the bad people, they want the children only work," Chantha says. "The little children carry a little water, pick up something — maybe stones."

Chip's eyes cloud over when she talks about this part of her life, her face becomes tense. Some Cambodians her age drew pictures of grown-ups being killed with axes. Some may never understand what they saw. After a short conversation in Cambodian, Chip and Chantha agree maybe Chip also pulled weeds and helped carry rice for transplanting.

In 1979, when there was no food, Chip's older sister took her to Thailand. Many Cambodians crossed the border several times looking for relatives, Chantha says. She also came to Thailand with her older sister. But when the sister went back to Cambodia for their mother, she found the mother had died. Chip and her sister stayed at the border for a short time, and then moved to Khao-I-Dang Refugee Camp.

Chip and her sister spent five years in Thailand. In Khao-I-Dang, Chip went to school for the first time. She was eleven, and the teachers were all Cambodian. She learned some math and how to read and write Cambodian. Many children did not go to school in the camp, Chip says. She went because her sister did not want her to forget Cambodia.

When she was fourteen, Chip and her sister were accepted for resettlement in the United States. They went to a transit camp in Thailand first, and then to the refugee processing center at Bataan, the Philippines. There, camp authorities placed Chip in the State Department-funded Preparation for American Secondary Schools program. Chip took classes in "things about the United States — like how to buy things in a store." But mostly she studied English, "how to call things — like the shirt, the skirt." (see box).

After five months in the Philippines, Chip and her sister boarded a plane for the United States. It was March, 1985. They were going to Lowell, Massachusetts, where the Cambodian friends who had agreed to sponsor them lived. One week later, Chip was enrolled in an American public school.

"I don't even know what classes they give me," she says. "English, Math, Science, I think." Even though she attended a special bilingual program, three days passed before she said anything in class. Three of her teachers were Cambodian, but they taught completely in English. Her classmates spoke English during the class and Cambodian after the bell.

Almost two years after entering the program, Chip now takes a mixture of special English classes and regular tenth grade classes like art and gym that don't require much English. There are twelve Cambodians, one Portuguese and one Indian in her section. One of the books they are learning to read is a simplified anthology of Mark Twain short stories.

"New Age" in an Age Old Tradition

Chip's story is typical. While the success stories of a few highly motivated refugees make good reading in newspapers, they are not typical of most Southeast Asian refugees' experiences. Most of the "super Asians" are upper-class Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese from the small merchant class of Southeast Asia's largest towns. These people were the most influenced by the West during the Vietnam War years and were often the first refugees to arrive here. The vast majority of urban poor and rural peasants who formed the bulk of later migrations remain relatively unacculturated. The

new life in the United States may hold little more for them than a place on an electronic parts assembly line. The age-old pool of cheap, compliant labor that new immigrants have formed for decades are now, like Chip's sister, constructing the technology of the "New Age."

Many Cambodians in Lowell live in the same houses where European and French Canadian immigrants, who worked in Lowell's shoe and furniture factories, once lived. Like earlier groups, the Cambodians are setting up a community of their own. All the apartments in Chip's building are filled with Cambodians. There are already three Cambodian stores in Lowell, where Chip can buy Cambodian-style food and clothes.

Chantha's Story

On the Disney Channel, Donald Duck has given way to Whoopie Goldberg, Michael Jackson and the latest creatures from the fantasy empire of George Lucas and Stephen Spielberg. Chantha watches as her children's eyes turn into dark pools. When she first arrived in the United States four years ago, Chantha says she found it hard to figure out what was true and what was not true on television.

"Now I say no — I don't believe that. But before, when I look at it, I say oh — I'm scared. I don't think it's real or not real," Chantha explains.

Chantha first lived in New York, then in Tacoma, Washington, and now in Lowell. She does not know where the father of her children lives anymore. She supports the children on welfare. It is not such a good thing, she admits, but it allows her to continue studying English. She has the confidence and some of the vocabulary to go a little further than just name things and connect them with simple verbs. She also knows the name of the "bad people." They were the communists. She speaks it as if nothing could be simpler.

Chantha's father was a low-ranking army officer who could read and write Cambodian and a little French. Her mother could read and write a little; her grandmother definitely could not.

There were some in Cambodia who could read and write very well, Chantha says. Of course Buddhist monks had to read very big books. She is trying to say economic rather than cultural factors may have been the cause of so much illiteracy in her country. In villages, the day began at five or six o'clock, and it ended shortly after the sun went down. There was no electricity — only lanterns. No televisions. No refrigerators. Some people cooked with gas, but most used wood and charcoal.

Reading the Signs

In the United States a person must learn to read because life is "faster," Chip says. "Here you need to read if you want to know something." Besides, Americans are not like Cambodians, she says. "When they don't know someone, they don't speak. Cambodians, if they don't know you, they will ask something."

Chip has yet to transfer much of what she has learned of English from the classroom to her regular life. There are no English magazines or newspapers in the apartment. She asks if a newspaper is like USA Today. She is embarrassed, but she doesn't think she can read them. When she rides the bus, she doesn't read the advertisements. When she goes to the store she just buys what is familiar. She says the most important thing to read outside school might be signs.

Both women are happy to have talked to us, especially since we seem to understand a little about the good and the bad of Southeast Asia: the tropical fruit that came in so many forms and the daily bits of horror that took place under the Khmer Rouge and in Thai refugee camps.

As we get up to leave, Chip asks whether Michael Jackson, who has been leading the sci-fi shock troops on the television in a new dance, is "Spanish."

"No, he's black," we say. Earlier Chantha has asked the same thing about Whoopie Goldberg.

The question seems to sum up just how far the two of them still are from the mainstream.

Preparing Adolescents for Secondary Schools

The Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS) program, gives 13 to 16 year-old refugees a way to prepare for the emotional and social upheaval that faces them in their new communities in the United States. The PASS program provides English as a Second Language, special math training, and cultural orientation to encourage teenagers to remain in school despite barriers of language and differences in educational background. The program, funded by the US Department of State, was developed by World Education, the Experiment in International Living, and Save the Children Federation, and is currently being implemented in Phanat Nikhom refugee camp in Thailand.

David Moffat is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in the Asian Wall Street Journal, the Christian Science Monitor and the Boston Globe Magazine.

Wendy Walker is a doctoral student in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Since 1981, she has worked with refugees in Thailand and in the United States.

Reports On...

Putting Learners Center-Stage

Materials that focus on the learner first

by David Kahler

Two literacy programs that have developed creative and interesting materials for use with immigrants and minority groups in North America recently came to the attention of World Education. The Community Outreach in Education (CORE) Foundation in North York, Ontario, Canada, put together a set of materials called *English at Work: A Tool Kit for Teachers*, and The American Reading Council in New York with the Little Sisters of the Assumption have produced their own materials for the Mothers' Reading Program.

These materials demonstrate the importance of putting adult learners center-stage to overcome attitudinal barriers to learning. Adults commonly feel that they are "too old to learn," or that education offers nothing but boredom due to frustration with previous educational offerings. Adult educators have found that these attitudes are often the most difficult to overcome, but such barriers can be breached if the curriculum and learning environment not only acknowledge, but draw, from adults' own experiences.

The methods and materials of both programs have roots clearly traceable to approaches used by educators working with poor communities in the Third World. Primarily, this means that the curricula were developed in collaboration with the learners themselves. Although the two programs appeal to very different audiences, all aspects of the approach used, including teaching process and materials, rely on the learner as her own teacher and as the teacher of others. The learner becomes responsible not only for identifying needs and problems, but also for exploring solutions and alternatives.

Both programs base the development of learning materials on several shared assumptions. First, as mentioned above, the starting point for learning materials, and the entire learning process, is the adult learner. Second, the content of the materials is drawn from the daily experiences and life histories of the learners. Third, the teacher/facilitator is a learner in the process as well. Fourth, the development and use of learner-centered materials validates the learners' own world-view and, with this affirmation, confers self-confidence. All of these

An illustration used to promote literacy.

factors contribute significantly to the development of language skills, as well as the ability to think critically and solve the daily problems of both the individual learner and his wider community. Lastly, a variety of participatory techniques and teaching tools help stimulate learner interest and accelerate the learning process.

Recognizing that adults have a wide vocabulary and rich personal experience in the workplace and in the home, the actual teaching materials generated by each program are used to help adult learners make the connection between the printed page and their daily lives and work. In the Mother's Reading Program, spontaneous discussions generated from the group's review of photographs, graphics or the newspaper provide the basis for the literacy materials. Using the mothering experience as a common theme, discussions focus on issues of family, racial conflict, prison life, slavery, rural life and migration. Transcripts of the conversations are prepared, then read by the group with an opportunity provided for the women to read individually, in pairs and as a group. Learning to read builds on what participants already know and have experienced. An approach which is capable of individualizing the language experience, as does this, establishes the kind of immediate connection between reader and printed word that literacy requires. The printed word becomes an extension of oral language, thought and personal emotion.

In the *Tool Kit for Teachers*, teachers worked with learners in shaping the materials, collecting stories in the workplace, interviewing, and taking photos. This highly-participatory process depends on forms of expression other than language for both teachers and learners. As a result, the materials stress a variety of ways of engaging learners with their own ideas and feelings, rather than merely passing on information.

Such an approach to the development of materials embodies the methodology of popular education. The curriculum is viewed as a process, not a finished product to be applied across every classroom with all learners. Photographs, cartoons, student-produced short stories and booklets, audio cassettes and posters are used as catalysts for the learning process. The focus shifts from the traditional "acquisition of language" to the development of language skills.

Readers interested in ways of learning languages and approaches to literacy that are more than sounds, words and structures and which focus on the learner as the major resource for learning mateirals are encouraged to contact staff of the two programs.

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From the Field

Field Report

Letter from Tanzania

Kitara Village,
Muleba District,
Kagera Region

During the 1970s, I worked as a teacher-trainer in Tanzania as part of the National Functional Literacy Program. It is more than ten years since the campaign began and after spending several years in the United States, I recently returned to Tanzania on a month's visit.

The program has had a tremendous impact throughout the country and the number of illiterate adults (10 years and over) dropped from 69% in 1975 to 15% in 1983. Official projections for 1986 suggest that only 5% of adult Tanzanians are still illiterate. When the campaign began, 80% of Tanzanian women were illiterate. By, 1981 illiteracy among women had been reduced to 27%.

While in Tanzania I had the opportunity to talk with three women in Kitara village in northwestern Tanzania, all of whom had been in and out of the national literacy programs during the past twelve years.

We discussed their reasons for wanting to become literate and whether their aspirations had been met. It became clear to me that these women had many different motivations and very rarely were they limited to a desire to master literacy and numeracy skills for their own sake. The need to earn cash is a major priority for most rural Tanzanian women, as demonstrated by the various activities undertaken by women not only in Kitara village but also in other parts of the country. Women are currently involved in beer brewing, poultry raising, selling second-hand clothing, petty trade and basket weaving. None of these activities actually requires formal skills but, by becoming literate and numerate, they know that their businesses will be run more efficiently, and they are likely to benefit economically.

Asha Musa joined in the program with the hope of getting a job or starting a business of her own when she graduated. Prior to joining the literacy program in 1974, Asha had had three years of formal education, and she could read and write effectively. Between 1974 and 1976, Asha studied political education and home economics, which included nutrition, child care, cookery, sewing and embroidery. All these were very important subjects to Asha and she mastered them to her advantage. But she had hoped to acquire a range of business skills that would make her employable, and her ambition to gain practical skills was not satisfied by the program.

Now Asha is thirty-six years old and she has seven children. She works as a casual laborer on a coffee plantation and whatever cash she earns goes into meeting the family's basic needs.

Being a farmer, Nyakato Luso wanted to learn methods of improving her crops. She inherited a coffee farm from her late father, and she also grows cassava, potatoes, maize, beans and yams. She was disappointed by the primers used in literacy, as they all, except one, were based on cash crops. She feels women's food crops have been ignored not only in the literacy program, but also by extension officers who concentrate on men's cash crops. Nyakato's ultimate goal is to become a self-sufficient farmer who not only feeds her family but also grows surplus crops for cash sale.

Theresa Saidi is the chairman of Kitara Women Handicraft Coop. She is 54 years old and has been an active participant in adult education programs. She attributes her leadership skills, her self confidence, and her ability to understand the country's policies to the programs in which she has participated. Along with these things, Theresa credits the literacy program for enlightening women on issues related to health, diseases and nutrition. Women in Kitara village now understand the importance of having their children immunized. Theresa is convinced that literacy training is a necessary tool for women to acquire knowledge, information and understanding in order to cope with change. She also recommends that any adult education program which involves women's participation should be conceived with women's roles and needs in mind.

These women show that the Functional Literacy Program still has unfinished business to accomplish. Given the central roles that women play in the family as bread winners, wives and mothers, training in literacy must be accompanied by meaningful programs related to income generation, agricultural training and employment. Because of general economic constraints, there is a severe shortage of reading materials in the country. This could give rise to a very real problem for many women who have graduated from literacy training who could lapse back into illiteracy. Furthermore, most of the reading materials which are available are not particularly relevant to women's roles or interests. In an attempt to meet this need, the Institute of Adult Education in Dar es Salaam is currently producing materials which concentrate on subsistence farming and growing food crops.

Hilda Kokhuhirwa worked in Tanzania as a teacher-trainer with the Ministry of National Education from 1971-73. She recently spent five years in the United States to complete her doctoral studies and hopes to return to Tanzania shortly where she will resume her position as senior resident tutor with the Institute of Adult Education.

Where to get further information on literacy...

Unesco

The World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession has published "A Guide to Unesco Sources on Literacy." The 17-page guide is available in French, English and Spanish from the Division of Primary Education, Literacy and Adult Education, and Education in Rural Areas, Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France.

Last October, Unesco began planning for International Literacy Year (1990) with the Third Collective Consultation on Literacy. Over 40 international NGOs active in the field of literacy attended the Collective Consultation at Unesco headquarters in Paris. Thailand will host the Fourth Collective Consultation of NGOs on Literacy in late 1987. For further information on the work of the Collective Consultation and Unesco's role in providing support for joint project activities, contact: Arthur Gillette at the Division of Primary Education, Literacy and Adult Education, and Education in Rural Areas (see address above).

The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)

Comprised of over 70 national and regional member associations, the ICAE focuses on research, information exchange, training, and advocacy on behalf of adult and nonformal education. Through international seminars, comparative studies, occasional papers, and the publication of a quarterly journal, the ICAE strengthens partnership between adult educators to support their efforts to foster more just and human-centered development.

Convergence, ICAE's quarterly journal recently published a special issue on "Training of Trainers and Adult Educators" (Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3-4, 1985). Subscription rates for one year: US$18.00 in the Third World; US$21.00 elsewhere; US $15.00 for students. For more information and a publications catalogue contact: ICAE headquarters, 29 Prince Arthur Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1B2.

Laubach Literacy International

Laubach Literacy is a non-profit educational corporation dedicated to enabling illiterate adults and older youth to acquire the listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics skills they need to solve the problems of daily life. With programs both in the US and overseas, Laubach has extensive experience in organizing individuals and communities for literacy action, as well as preparing materials for new readers. For a complimentary issue of their quarterly newsletter and further information on Laubach programs, write: Director of Public Communications, Laubach Literacy International, Box 131, Syracuse NY 13210, USA.

Canadian Organization for Development Through Education (CODE)

A non-profit organization, CODE provides books, funds and services to thousands of literacy organizations and educators throughout the developing world. CODE publishes a quarterly newsletter, NGOMA, and informational brochures about its activities. For more information, contact: CODE National Office, 321 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 7Z2.

International Reading Association (IRA)

The IRA promotes literacy through numerous publications of use to literacy professionals and volunteer tutors. A publications catalogue is available on request.

With funding from UNESCO, IRA has recently produced a French and English version of *How to Prepare Materials for New Literates* (available from International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, Delaware 19714, USA; US$7.00 per book)

The German Foundation for International Development (DSE)

For over a decade, the German Foundation's Education, Science and Documentation Center has concentrated on training activities in the field of nonformal basic education that address problems of curriculum development, evaluation, and the production of low-cost teaching and reading materials.

Together with the ICAE, the German Foundation published a report, including extracts from papers, on an international seminar held in West Berlin in 1983. Entitled "One Billion Illiterates, One Billion Reasons for Action," the publication is available from the ICAE at the above address, or: Deutsche Stiftung Für Internationale Entwicklung (DSE), Education Section, Hans-Böckler Strasse 5, D-5300 Bonn 3, Federal Republic of Germany.

Publications

- *Focus on Basics*. World Education announces the debut of a resource bulletin to provide adult educators with information on innovative and effective teaching practices currently used in basic-skills programs throughout the United States. US$10 for three issues in September, January, and April. Available from: *Focus on Basics*, World Education, 210 Lincoln Street, Boston MA 02111.
- *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*. David Harman (1987). Cambridge Adult Education Company. (US $11.95)
- *Peace Corps Literacy Handbook*. John Comings and David Kahler (1984). Single complimentary copy available for professionals working in development organizations in US or overseas. Available from Peace Corps, Information Collection and Exchange, Office of Training and Program Support, 806 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20526, USA.

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Women: The Second Decade